Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation

A Case Study of Taiwan’s 2020 Elections

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COMBATTING AND DEFEATING CHINESE PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF TAIWAN’S 2020 ELECTIONS

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¹ This Policy Analysis Exercise reflects the author’s views only. It should not be viewed as representing the views of the US State Department, nor Harvard University or any of its faculty.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its 2020 presidential and legislative elections, Taiwan combatted and defeated Chinese propaganda and disinformation through a whole-of-society approach, one in which the government became better at debunking fake news and raising awareness of these attacks; civil society became more alert and created non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to detect, debunk, and block fake news online; and companies such as Facebook and LINE (similar to WhatsApp) became faster at finding and removing fake accounts and disinformation.

Using Taiwan’s most recent elections as an example to elucidate the nature of Chinese propaganda and disinformation, this report identifies China’s motives, tactics, and actors in its foreign information warfare. Similar to Russia’s, China’s motives are to destabilize democracy and weaken governance in a target country by sowing doubts and chaos in its society, undermining its self-confidence, and increasing polarization and disunity. Its tactics include the following: 1) worsen existing social, political, economic, and generational divides; 2) exploit weaknesses in the informational system; 3) financially control and absorb traditional media; 4) employ its cyber army; 5) obfuscate the attack source through technological, commercial, and legal means; and 6) make the attacks partisan so that one side will at worst not condemn it and at best magnify the effects of its attacks. Its actors are the Chinese Cyberspace Administration, Central Propaganda Department, United Front Department, People’s Liberation Army Strategic Support Force, State Council’s Taiwan Affairs Office, 50-Cent Party (cyber army) and its content farms, and provinces, as well as agents from the target country employed by the Chinese government.

With a fuller understanding of Chinese propaganda and disinformation operations, the US government can better protect America at home (when it comes to election interference) and abroad (in terms of Chinese operations in other countries against the US) and fight against the Chinese Communist Party’s narratives and values around the world. The Taiwanese government was successful against these operations because it increased public communication, improved its credibility with Taiwanese society, partnered with other sectors, and reacted swiftly and uniformly. Drawing on its success, the author suggests the policy recommendations below for the US State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC) (charged with combating foreign propaganda and disinformation) to begin that work. They are ordered by the level of importance (least [1] to most [12]) and implementation ease (easiest [1] to hardest [12]).

1. Create a database of propaganda and disinformation experts from around the world and track their research findings.

2. Cooperate with the State Department’s special envoy on countering China’s UN in-
fluence to understand and combat Chinese efforts to use propaganda and disinformation to reshape international norms and values.

3. Draw from the Taiwanese government’s debunking strategy to create a State Department standard operating procedure (SOP) for responding to foreign propaganda and disinformation.

4. Conduct "combatting foreign propaganda and disinformation" workshops with Public Affairs Bureau officers so they can react quickly and efficiently when attacks occur.

5. Require each diplomatic mission to submit an SOP for responding to propaganda and disinformation against the US in its host country for the GEC's approval.

6. Add monitoring and reporting on Chinese propaganda and disinformation operations globally to the State Department’s regional China watchers’ portfolio.

7. Add monitoring and reporting on propaganda and disinformation against the US in the host country to the portfolio of each mission’s information officer.

8. Host a conference that brings together relevant civil societies, businesses, NGOs, and government agencies worldwide to brainstorm ways to combat propaganda and disinformation and exchange best practices.

9. Host a high-level conference or ministerial on propaganda and disinformation to highlight the issue’s severity and find ways for America and its allies and partners to jointly address this problem.

10. Contract NGOs and businesses to monitor propaganda and disinformation against the US in each country through US diplomatic missions.

11. Work with intelligence agencies (e.g. the National Security Agency, the Treasury Department’s Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Office, and the State Department’s Intelligence and Research Bureau) to identify which entities are launching these attacks against the US and its allies and partners.

12. Work with the US Treasury Department and other State Department sanctions bureaus to sanction these entities (see point 11) so that they cannot hire local agents in target countries to create and amplify their propaganda and disinformation.
INTRODUCTION

The US was overwhelmed by Russian propaganda and disinformation\(^3\) during its 2016 elections. American society has since embarked on a quest to combat these Russian attacks and safeguard its electoral process. However, on the eve of its 2020 elections, and in an era of Sino-American great power competition, there is a new electoral threat: Chinese propaganda and disinformation. Combined with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese propaganda and disinformation have the potential to influence the world’s perception of Beijing, distort America’s image globally, and reshape international norms and values on human rights, rule of law, and sovereignty, having significant implications for geopolitics and the international order.\(^4\) Thus, the US and its State Department must better comprehend China’s propaganda and disinformation power and ways to defeat it. Using Taiwan’s 2020 presidential and legislative elections as a case study, this report aims to do just that: 1) to analyze Chinese propaganda and disinformation’s capabilities and limits and 2) to understand how a small country such as Taiwan (smaller than China by a factor of 23 in GDP, 60 in population size, and 267 in land mass) was able to combat and defeat China’s information campaigns.

KEY CONCEPT EXPLAINED: SHARP POWER

This report employs the concept of sharp power to explain Chinese propaganda and disinformation activities. Coined by the National Endowment of Democracy, sharp power is a country’s asymmetric ability to perforate the target country’s political and informational ecosystems.\(^5\) The goals are to cut the target country’s fabric of society and to stoke and amplify existing divisions.\(^6\) Sharp power tactics include those of information warfare: propaganda, media manipulation, and disinformation. It is different from soft power because it is not about attraction or persuasion, but manipulation, distraction, confusion, division, and repression.\(^7\) Moreover, unlike soft power, sharp power 1) lacks transparency, accountability, journalistic integrity, and diversity of thought and 2) focuses on political, not cultural, aims, such as advancing state narratives.\(^8\) Sharp power has become of special concern because research

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3 Disinformation is “false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth,” according to Merriam-Webster.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 National Endowment of Democracy (NED) interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/13/19.
is showing that falsehood diffuses "significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects [are] more pronounced for false political news."\(^9\)

**CHINESE SHARP POWER IN THE PAST**

China has long engaged in sharp power activities. "To achieve victory, one must, as far as possible, make the enemy blind and deaf by sealing his eyes and ears and...creating confusion in his mind" is a Mao Zedong adage that has been followed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since its founding.\(^10\) What is now referred to as Chinese sharp power is commonly called United Front work.\(^11\) Before, it would come in the form of airdropping propaganda leaflets over Taiwan-controlled areas to spread rumors about defections, stir up unrest to misdirect enemy planning, and amplify people’s fear that the US was unable to protect Taiwan.\(^12\)

**CHINESE SHARP POWER NOW**

In October 2007, then-CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao announced in his 17th National Congress of the Communist Party report a new push to "shape public opinion and perceptions around the world," now referred to as the "global propaganda expansion" (大外宣).\(^13\) This expansion entailed a six-billion-dollar investment into domestic and foreign media companies and other information organizations to exert discourse control in other countries.\(^14\)\(^15\)\(^16\)

**WHY TAIWAN’S 2020 ELECTIONS AS A CASE STUDY?**

One should pay special attention to Taiwan when analyzing Chinese sharp power because it is a testing ground for the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to perfect its sharp power model and export its operations elsewhere, including the US.\(^19\)\(^20\) Taiwan and China have been in a "hostile relationship" since Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who opposes uni-

\(^13\) Cardenal, Juan P., et al., "Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence."
\(^14\) Liberty Times (LT) interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
\(^15\) Former National Taiwan University (NTU) Journalist Chih-Te Lee (李志德) interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\(^16\) 何清漣. 紅色滲透:中國媒體全球擴張的真相. 新北市: 八旗文化出版, 2019, pp. 25.
\(^18\) Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\(^19\) Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
\(^20\) NED interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/13/19.
fication, was elected in 2016. Reiterating Beijing’s past position, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in early 2019 said in a speech at the Great Hall of the People that complete re-unification was a historic task and that "we make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary means." One of these means, as stated in a Chinese government media editorial, is to "adopt various measures to make Taiwan ruled by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) turn into a Lebanon situation which ‘Taiwan independence’ forces cannot afford," meaning to exacerbate ethnic, political, and social rifts within Taiwan. China seeks to accomplish this through sharp power, which is why Taiwan is ranked as the country most exposed to foreign disinformation, much higher than the US (13th) and Ukraine (14th)—both currently inundated with Russian disinformation.

REPORT OVERVIEW

This report begins with a brief discussion of its research methodology, namely qualitative interviews, media monitoring, and literature review. It then highlights the main Chinese sharp power attacks in Taiwan’s 2020 elections, including questioning President Tsai’s doctoral degree, attempting to influence top Taiwanese media leaders at a Beijing conference, rehashing contentious domestic issues such as same-sex marriage legalization, smearing a former Chinese spy who exposed China’s covert influence operations, attacking the Taiwanese government’s bill against foreign interference, and creating doubts around Taiwan’s election integrity. Thereafter, using these attacks and other smaller operations, this paper dissects the anatomy of Chinese sharp power, describing its motives, tactics, and actors.

The report then argues that while Chinese propaganda and disinformation in this election period deepened social and generational divides, they did not affect the election outcome. This is because Taiwan had a whole-of-society response to combat and defeat Chinese sharp power: simply put, the government worked with civil society to provide accurate

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21 Taiwan National Security Council (NSC) interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
23 Ibid.
24 "Taiwan can’t gamble on cross-Straits crisis," Global Times, 1 April 2019, http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1144298.shtml.
information quickly, online platforms worked with civil society to fact-check and remove fake news, and the government worked with online platforms to take down content that threatened to harm Taiwan’s electoral process. Additionally, Taiwan was helped by the fact that China’s sharp power apparatus was also focused on Hong Kong’s November 2019 local elections. Afterward, the report offers a word of caution to those combatting propaganda and disinformation, contending that the Taiwanese government and society could potentially overreact, over politicize, and give in to hysteria when faced with sharp power attacks. Finally, this report concludes with implications for the US and policy recommendations for the State Department’s Global Engagement Center to respond to propaganda and disinformation from the PRC and other foreign entities.

The appendix contains the list of interviewees (A), general interview questions (B), a chart of major Taiwanese media outlets’ political and governmental affiliations (C), a 2019 graph showing Taiwan’s most used social media platforms (D), examples of Chinese propaganda and disinformation from Taiwanese newspapers (E), and disclaimers on research assumptions, limitations, and ethical considerations (F).
METHODOLOGY

The report utilizes three research methods to gauge the effects of Chinese sharp power on the elections and of Taiwan’s cross-sector response: qualitative interviews, media monitoring, and literature review.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS
First, the project’s focus was on qualitative interviews. The author interviewed 40 individuals, most of whom are Taiwanese government officials in the digital, communications, and security spheres; television, print, and online journalists; political and civil society leaders; and academics. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, most individuals are attributed only by their respective organizations. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Taipei, Taiwan, with nine done in the US. They were semi-structured and mostly in Mandarin. Appendix A is the interviewee list, and Appendix B is the list of general questions asked.

MEDIA MONITORING
Second, for two months before Taiwan’s 2020 elections, the author monitored the daily newspapers of three major Taiwanese print outlets accused of being influenced by China (i.e. China Times, Want Daily, United Daily News). The author systematically scanned for and collected propaganda and disinformation content from the front pages. Appendix C is a chart of major Taiwanese news organizations’ political and governmental affiliations, and Appendix E contains examples of such content.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Lastly, this project reviewed existing English- and Chinese-language research on related topics:

» Sharp power definition and history  
» Typology of media manipulation and disinformation operations  
» Architecture and process of propaganda and disinformation campaigns  
» Response strategies to propaganda and disinformation campaigns  
» History of Chinese sharp power in Taiwan

A NOTE ON ESTIMATING EFFECTS
There is not yet a sound, quantitative way to measure the effects of propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation on an election.27 28 29 Taiwan’s top disinformation expert Dr.

28 Harvard Kennedy School Dr. Matthew Baum interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/12/19.  
29 Taiwan National Taipei University Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
Puma Shen is attempting to quantitatively gauge their effects on the 2020 elections now through an experiment involving voter surveys before and after the elections, as well as a focus group with those the surveys identified as fake news victims.\textsuperscript{30} In the meantime, this report uses the preponderance of evidence method\textsuperscript{31} to gauge the effects of Chinese sharp power and Taiwan’s response. This qualitative method builds a case on how effective both sides were by reaching convergent conclusions from an accumulation of circumstantial evidence from different expert interviews and polls. The method is similar to the one University of Pennsylvania Communications Professor Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson used to show the effects of Russian sharp power on America’s 2016 elections.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Preponderance of evidence is “the standard of proof in which the party bearing the burden of proof must present evidence which shows that the fact to be proven is more probable than not,” according to Merriam-Webster.
\end{itemize}
MAIN CHINESE SHARP POWER ATTACKS IN THE 2020 ELECTIONS

ORIGINS

Chinese sharp power campaigns in Taiwan began around 2008, experts suggest. Through traditional Taiwanese media, Chinese propaganda thrived during former Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou’s tenure (2008 to 2016). It thrived because the propaganda was focused on how amazing China was, and that was beneficial to Ma’s friendly cross-Strait relations agenda. Negative online disinformation operations, however, became apparent in 2016, after Tsai was elected president and as Taiwanese people of all ages, especially older people, started using Facebook and LINE (similar to WhatsApp). Since then, Taiwan’s traditional media and social media have been spreading and mutually reinforcing falsehoods from China. During the 2020 election period, as Tsai stated, "China has increased its coercion tactics... It has been doing so through a combination of military threats, disinformation and propaganda, infiltration, and other methods." — President Tsai

Below are six of the main Chinese sharp power attacks during the 2020 elections:

QUESTIONING PRESIDENT TSAI’S DOCTORAL DEGREE (MAY 2019)

First is the falsehood that Tsai’s London School of Economics (LSE) doctoral degree was fake. Here, China’s role was in propagating and amplifying this false story. If any attack were to affect the elections, it would have been this one. The false story came about during the ruling DPP’s presidential primary election. Because Tsai was unable to find her LSE diploma, thesis, and transcript at the beginning to prove her degree, the story gained

33 LT interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
34 Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
35 Senior foreign journalist #2 interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
36 Ibid.
37 NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
40 Taiwan Presidential Office (PO) interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
41 Davidson College Dr. Shelley Rigger interview, Taipei, 1/6/20.
42 Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
further traction. Furthermore, China’s cyber army flooded Taiwan’s social media space with this story. Even though the LSE later confirmed her doctorate in an official statement, this misinformation continued to be spread by both traditional and social media outlets.

INFLUENCING TAIWAN’S TOP MEDIA LEADERS AT A BEIJING CONFERENCE (MAY 10, 2019)

In its second notable influence operation, the Chinese government gathered 70 Taiwanese media leaders in Beijing on May 10, 2019, and asked them to fulfill their social responsibilities and help promote the peaceful unification process. The “Cross-Strait Media People Summit” was cohosted by Taiwan’s Want Want China Times Media Group, long suspected of taking direction from the Chinese government, and China’s Beijing Newspaper Group, a Chinese state media entity. During the conference, Wang Yang, a Politburo Standing Committee member and one of China’s seven top leaders, said that media from both sides of the Strait must, “uphold national ethics, fulfill their social responsibilities, and jointly play the role of communicating to people on both sides of the Strait by promoting Chinese culture, deepening the integration of emotions, and continuing to promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and the process of peaceful reunification of the motherland, and strive to realize the China dream.” After laughing at his mocking of the Taiwanese government, Taiwanese executives were told by Wang, “...as we want to realize ‘peaceful unification, one country, two systems’, we need to rely on the joint efforts with our friends in the media...I believe you understand the situation...history will remember you.” Unsurprisingly, the executives were from outlets accused of being under Beijing’s influence.

REHASHING CONTENTIOUS DOMESTIC ISSUES (THROUGHOUT THE ELECTION)

Third is the online rehashing of contentious domestic issues that dominated the 2018 midterms elections, when the ruling DPP lost significantly. Experts claimed that the Chinese cyber army and content farms created and/or circulated in Taiwan’s cyberspace fake stories on polarizing issues, including same-sex marriage (see Exhibit A), LGBTQ+ rights,
pensions reform, nuclear energy, and labor laws.\textsuperscript{51} For example, there were fake stories claiming that queer Taiwanese blood donors were causing HIV to spread.\textsuperscript{54} Other fake online claims accused the Taiwanese government of 1) using pension funds to attract Korean and Japanese tourists to make up for the drop in Chinese tourists and 2) giving Taiwanese Pride Parade organizers financial support so that they could bring in overseas queer people to join the parade.\textsuperscript{55} \textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Exhibit A:}
Supporters celebrating Taiwan’s legalization of same-sex marriage outside the Legislative Yuan (Photo: Chiang Ying-ying/AP).

SMEARING A DEFECTED CHINESE SPY WHO EXPOSED ITS COVERT INFLUENCE OPERATIONS (NOVEMBER 2019)

Fourth, China launched a smear campaign to discredit William Wang, the defected Chinese spy who blew the whistle on Chinese interference operations abroad.\textsuperscript{57} \textsuperscript{58} Wang, who is now in Australia seeking asylum, detailed how he was given a fake South Korean passport in May to infiltrate Taiwan and launch an operation to defeat Tsai in the 2020 elections.\textsuperscript{59} This operation would have included directing a cyber army, working with Taiwanese media executives, and creating media and internet companies to launch targeted attacks

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{51} NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Taiwan National Chengchi University Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} LT interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Su, Alice, “Can fact-checkers save Taiwan from a flood of Chinese fake news?”
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
\end{itemize}
and shift political opinions.\textsuperscript{60} Almost immediately, the Chinese government dismissed his accusations and said he was a convicted criminal.\textsuperscript{61} Chinese disinformation tried to paint Wang as being close to the DPP by propagating a picture of someone who looks like him at a DPP gathering.\textsuperscript{62,63} In the two months leading up to the elections, Want Daily, a newspaper reportedly under Chinese influence, published four front-page propaganda stories against Wang, two of which came directly from Chinese state media (see Appendix E). Likewise, China Times, under the same media group as Want Daily, published five such front-page propaganda stories, two of which were pulled directly from Chinese state media Global Times (see Appendix E).

**ATTACKING THE GOVERNMENT’S FOREIGN INTERFERENCE BILL (DECEMBER 2019)**

Fifth, there was a concerted attack online, on television, and in newspapers against the government’s Anti-Infiltration Bill, which sought to stem foreign infiltration into Taiwan’s political system.\textsuperscript{64,65} For example, in the two months leading up to the elections, Want Daily had six front-page propaganda stories against this bill, with lines similar to those of the Chinese government (see Appendix E). Similarly, China Times had two front-page propaganda stories, one of which came directly from Chinese state media China News Service (see Appendix E).

**CREATING DOUBTS AROUND TAIWAN’S ELECTION INTEGRITY (JANUARY 2020)**

Finally, China sought to affect the public perception of the integrity of Taiwan’s election results.\textsuperscript{66} Before the elections, Taiwan’s Central Election Commission (CEC) debunked two to three salient false news stories per day.\textsuperscript{67} Such disinformation questioned the CEC’s fairness and integrity.\textsuperscript{68} After the elections, there were Chinese disinformation packages aiming to invalidate Tsai’s victory and blame the CIA for manipulating the results.\textsuperscript{69,70} The Taiwan Fact Check Center, a nonprofit dedicated to debunking falsehoods, also reported significant disinformation activities around the electoral process.

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\textsuperscript{60} McKenzie, Nick, et al., “Defecting Chinese spy offers information trove to Australian government.”


\textsuperscript{62} DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.

\textsuperscript{63} Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.

\textsuperscript{64} DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.

\textsuperscript{65} Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.

\textsuperscript{66} DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.

\textsuperscript{67} Central News Agency (CNA) interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69} Taiwanese Digital Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.

\textsuperscript{70} Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
DISSECTING CHINESE PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION: MOTIVES, TACTICS, ACTORS

MOTIVES
The Chinese government's ultimate goal is to keep the CCP in power, and it does that by maintaining legitimacy through developing the economy and protecting China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. As economic development slows, territorial integrity becomes more important, and thus the Taiwan issue increases in importance as well.

Taiwan is a core CCP issue, and while the CCP's eventual goal is unification, its immediate goal is to deter Taiwanese independence. Beijing wants to prevent Taiwan from declaring independence because it worries that Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet would then be inspired to follow suit, endangering China's territorial integrity and domestic stability. What has been fueling Taiwan's desire to declare independence is its democracy: Taiwan's democracy is strengthening a Taiwanese identity that is separate from China's, a commitment to a constitutional system that is missing in China, and a sentiment that is against Chinese nationalism. Therefore, China needs to disrupt that democracy, that identity, and that independence movement, and this is where Chinese propaganda and disinformation come in.

In the short term, Beijing seeks to use sharp power to defeat the more pro-independence DPP and influence the election results. On one hand, it wants to make the DPP government seem ineffective and create distrust between the DPP government and the public. On the other hand, it aims to support the China-friendly Kuomintang (KMT), as it sees KMT as less encumbered by ideology and better able to stabilize cross-Strait relations.

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71 Harvard University Professor on China interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/10/19.
72 Ibid.
73 MOFA interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
74 Harvard University Dr. Steven Goldstein interview, Los Angeles, CA, 12/19/19.
75 Harvard University Professor on China interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/10/19.
76 Goldstein interview, Los Angeles, CA, 12/19/19.
77 Harvard University Professor on China interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/10/19.
78 Boston College Dr. Robert Ross interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/11/19.
79 Ibid.
80 Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
81 NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
82 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
83 孔德廉, 柯皓翔, 劉致昕, 許家瑜, “打不死的內容農場——揭開「密訊」背後操盤手和中國因素.”
84 Ross interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/11/19.
85 Cole, J Michael, “Chinese Interference in Taiwan’s Elections is Part of a Two-Pronged Attack on Democracy.”
In the long term, the Chinese government plans to employ its sharp power to soften and weaken Taiwan for unification. First, this includes sowing confusion, doubt, and chaos, attempting to distract and stifle discussions. Then, Beijing aims to polarize the Taiwanese society, ensuring that Taiwanese people are disunited. With chaos and polarization, they begin to lose trust in democracy and themselves. After creating this insecurity, China seeks to use propaganda to make its authoritarian system appear superior. Taiwanese people, feeling weak and lacking self-confidence, then start to believe that they cannot survive without China and become resigned to eventual unification, moving China one step closer to unification.

**TACTICS**

To meet its objectives, China employed the following methods in Taiwan's 2020 elections:
1. worsening existing social, political, economic, and generational divides;
2. exploiting weaknesses in the informational system;
3. controlling and absorbing traditional media financially;
4. using its cyber army;
5. obfuscating attack sources through technological, commercial, and legal means; and
6. making the attacks partisan so that one side will at worst not condemn them and at best magnify their effects.

**Increase social, political, economic, and generational polarization**

First, China learned from Russian propaganda and disinformation operations in Ukraine and the US and uses sharp power to create and exacerbate societal divisions within Tai-
One can see this with the Chinese cyber army’s persistent rehashing of contentious domestic issues from Taiwan’s 2018 referenda, such as queer sex education and pensions reform, during the 2020 elections. These issues in 2018 were able to split the society based on education, income, generation, and geography. This method is particularly useful because extreme polarization is a major weakness of democracies. With severe interest divergence, politics becomes more antagonistic and hostile, consensus becomes more difficult to build, it becomes more challenging for a government to serve the majority’s interests, and governing becomes harder.

**Exploit weaknesses in the informational system**

Second, China takes advantage of the many vulnerabilities within Taiwan’s media ecosystem.

Taiwan’s media sector is intensely commercial; media is less about educating the public and more about profit-seeking through advertisements. In Taiwan, outlets frequently do not disclose that their advertisements are advertisements; there can be articles or segments that seem like news stories but are in fact paid advertisements. Therefore, as uncovered financial transaction documents have shown, China has been able to pass much of its propaganda as news stories, even though they were paid advertisements. China also has been able to influence and direct numerous media organizations because it is a major source of their advertisement revenue.

Taiwan’s media sector is also overly competitive. Because the economic situation is deteriorating for these media companies, and because social media is drawing people away...because social media is drawing people away from traditional outlets, the focus is on surviving, and these outlets survive by publishing stories that get the most clicks and the highest ratings.

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98 NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
99 Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
100 Dr. Yi-Suo Tzeng interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
101 NED interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/13/19.
102 Ibid.
103 CNA interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.
104 Reporters Without Borders interview, Taipei, 1/7/20.
105 Senior foreign journalist #2 interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
106 Hsu, Chien-Jung, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” Asian Survey 54, no. 3 (2014), 515-539.
108 Hsu, Chien-Jung, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media.”
109 Reporters Without Borders interview, Taipei, 1/7/20.
from traditional outlets, the focus is on surviving, and these outlets survive by publishing stories that get the most clicks and the highest ratings. Unfortunately, what garner the most attention are often falsehoods, not truths. As a result, many journalists report on suspicious, sensational stories as quickly as possible without fact-checking, accelerating the diffusion of Chinese propaganda and disinformation.

This illustrates two more weaknesses: the public's desire for speed (求快) and sensation. Reporters interviewed shared that with the current "speed culture" (速時文化) and the advent of "instant news" (即時新聞), journalists do not have the time to verify information and sources. Even when reporters want to verify, there is upper management pressure against it. For example, during the election season, Taiwan's top military official died in a helicopter crash. Yet there was a fake news story indicating that the general was rescued. When Apple Daily reporters tried to fact-check it, their managers asked them why it was not up when other outlets had already published it. In the end, the reporters had to report the fake news and contributed to the spread of misinformation. Similarly, because the Taiwanese public rewards sensational stories through clicks and shares, journalists have undue pressure to report sensational, polarizing stories from Facebook and PTT (Taiwanese equivalent of Reddit), including those from Chinese content farms. Combining these two weaknesses, traditional Taiwanese journalists end up inadvertently amplifying Chinese sharp power.

The final vulnerability discussed here is the Taiwanese government's hesitance to regulate the press. Because of Taiwan's decades-long history with martial law, the government does not wish to be seen in any way as infringing on media freedom. For example, the ruling DPP did not pass a foreign agent registration act in May 2019 because it was worried about accusations of "green

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Because of Taiwan's decades-long history with martial law, the government does not wish to be seen in any way as infringing on media freedom.

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110 SET interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.  
111 Apple Daily interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.  
112 CNA interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.  
113 TTV interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.  
114 Vosoughi, Sorosh, Roy, Deb, and Sinan Aral, "The spread of true and false news online."  
115 UDN interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.  
117 Reporters Without Borders interview, Taipei, 1/7/20.  
118 TTV interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.  
120 Ibid.  
121 UDN interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.  
122 Schmitt, Gary, and Michael Mazza, "Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan’s Democracy."  
123 NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
terror” (green is the DPP’s color, and “green terror” is recalling White Terror, Taiwan’s martial law period when political dissidents were persecuted, tortured, and disappeared). Thus, no one is regulating print and online journalism (television and radio news are regulated by the Taiwan National Communications Commission (NCC) for content accuracy and balanced reporting). There is not even a penalty for reporting fake news as long as it is corrected afterward at some point. China exploited this lack of governance and injected rampant propaganda and disinformation into Taiwan’s media environment during the 2020 elections.

Control and absorb traditional media financially

Third, the Chinese government exercises its sharp power by controlling Taiwanese media groups financially. It does this through 1) supporting media owners' businesses in China, 2) becoming an important part of news outlets' revenue stream, and 3) establishing its own outlets in Taiwan. Many Taiwanese media owners conduct business in China. To protect their Chinese business interests and gain Chinese government support (whether legal or commercial), the owners, who often already have pro-China views, take newspaper directions from Beijing and other Chinese provincial leaders. Similarly, because the Chinese government is essential to their revenue stream (whether through advertisements or covert subsidies), outlets, especially smaller ones, take China's instructions and self-censor on "sensitive" issues. For example, on June 4, 2019, many Taiwanese outlets did not report on the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. While one often views propaganda as pushing information, this is propaganda by removing information from the media ecosystem. The Chinese government also establishes its own outlets in Taiwan, such as the Taiwan China Review News (台灣中國評論通訊社). In this case, the Taiwan China Review News has offices and reporters in Taiwan and is legally a Taiwanese media agency, but it is tied to Hong Kong’s China Review News, which reportedly takes Chinese government instructions.

124 Dr. Yi-Suo Tzeng interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
125 CNA interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.
126 Storm Media interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
127 LT interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
129 NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
130 Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
131 Hsu, Chien-Jung, “China's Influence on Taiwan's Media.”
132 Senior foreign journalist #1 interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
133 Reporters Without Borders interview, Taipei, 1/7/20.
134 Lee, Yimou, and I-hwa Cheng, "Paid ‘news’: China using Taiwan media to win hearts and minds on island – sources."
135 Senior foreign journalist #2 interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
137 Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
138 Ibid.
Want Want China Times Media Group: One noteworthy case is the Want Want China Times Media Group one. It is now well-documented that outlets acquired by this group in 2006 and 2008, including China Times, Want Daily, CTi TV, and CTV (known as "red media"), are under strong Chinese influence.\textsuperscript{139} \textsuperscript{140} Privately, all Taiwanese journalists interviewed attested to this fact. The Chinese government obtained this influence by providing the group's chairman, Tsai Eng-meng, with commercial support for his food and media businesses in China and contributing to these compromised Taiwanese outlets' budget.\textsuperscript{141} \textsuperscript{142} \textsuperscript{143} The model is this: Tsai builds political power through his outlets, directs these outlets to spread Chinese propaganda and disinformation, and gains Chinese favor in return for PRC assistance for his mainland businesses.\textsuperscript{144} \textsuperscript{145} \textsuperscript{146} The level of Chinese influence in these outlets is substantial. According to multiple sources, Chinese State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) sets major news directions for the Want Want Group, gives these outlets' chief editors reporting and coverage-framing instructions—which are then passed on to reporters—feeds these outlets with content to report (via phone calls or physical envelopes), monitors their news coverage, and "visits" (i.e. inspects) their offices.\textsuperscript{147} \textsuperscript{148} \textsuperscript{149} \textsuperscript{150} \textsuperscript{151} \textsuperscript{152} On the other side, these outlets ask the TAO how to cover a story, send articles to the TAO before publishing, and self-censor based on China's and Chairman Tsai's positions.\textsuperscript{153} \textsuperscript{154} \textsuperscript{155} As an example, in 2017, a former DPP operative (李明哲) was disappeared and subsequently arrested in China for political reasons, and China Times told its reporters not to cover this story so as to not damage China's image.\textsuperscript{156} There are also many cases of Want Want outlets directly publishing a Chinese state media report and posting the same script as that of a Chinese state media outlet before that outlet posted it.\textsuperscript{157}

Other Taiwanese outlets: Other outlets with monied interests in China, such as those whose managers attended the 2019 "Cross-Strait Media People Summit," have also been

\textsuperscript{139} Hille, Kathrin, "Taiwan primaries highlight fears over China's political influence."
\textsuperscript{140} Reporters Without Borders interview, Taipei, 1/7/20.
\textsuperscript{141} China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\textsuperscript{142} Former senior China Times journalist interview, Cambridge, MA, 1/29/20.
\textsuperscript{143} Former TVBS journalist interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
\textsuperscript{144} China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\textsuperscript{145} Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\textsuperscript{146} Senior foreign journalist #1 interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Hille, Kathrin, "Taiwan primaries highlight fears over China's political influence."
\textsuperscript{149} Former senior China Times journalist interview, Cambridge, MA, 1/29/20.
\textsuperscript{150} China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\textsuperscript{151} Former TVBS journalist interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
\textsuperscript{152} TVBS interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\textsuperscript{153} China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\textsuperscript{154} Senior foreign journalist #2 interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\textsuperscript{155} Apple Daily interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
\textsuperscript{156} China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\textsuperscript{157} Storm Media interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
implicated by interviewees for receiving financial and/or tacit support from the Chinese
government and being influenced by it.\textsuperscript{158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164} The financial support comes
in the form of commercial revenue or budgetary funding.\textsuperscript{165, 166} These outlets experience
similar Chinese influence as that of those under the Want Want Group. One illustrative
case is of TVBS being directed by China to take down a November 2018 exclusive interview
with former American Institute in Taiwan (US mission in Taiwan) Chairman James
Moriarty.\textsuperscript{167} It was removed because Moriarty remarked, "There are obviously attempts by
external powers here in Taiwan to try and alter the debate and spread false information,
and those are dangerous."\textsuperscript{168}

\textbf{Employ its cyber army}

Fourth, the Chinese government utilizes its cyber army (i.e. fake accounts, purchased
accounts, content farms, and online media outlets) to exert sharp power in three ways:
spreading disinformation online and on PTT (Taiwanese equivalent of Reddit), creating
and/or circulating negative propaganda about Taiwan, and propagating fake news in LINE
(similar to WhatsApp).\textsuperscript{169} All three are further amplified online, on television, and in newspapers by compromised traditional Taiwanese media.\textsuperscript{170, 171} These fake news stories have
the effect of not only changing perceptions but also dictating the narrative and topic of the
day. A study showed that PTT accounts that were moderately pro-DPP shifted to pro-CCP
after being purchased on Taiwanese and Chinese auction sites ahead of the elections.\textsuperscript{172}
Journalists reported that small, online media outlets post content directly from the Chinese
government and content farms; in one case, 23 of these outlets posted the same
PRC propaganda article simultaneously without even changing the title.\textsuperscript{173, 174, 175} Moreover,
an investigation found that 60 percent of contentious information and fake news on LINE

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{158} UDN interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Former TVBS journalist interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
\item \textsuperscript{161} TVBS interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Former senior China Times journalist interview, Cambridge, MA, 1/29/20.
\item \textsuperscript{163} China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Senior foreign journalist #2 interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Former TVBS journalist interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
\item \textsuperscript{166} China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\item \textsuperscript{167} Someone with direct knowledge of the situation, Taipei.
\item \textsuperscript{168} DeAeth, Duncan, "Interview with AIT chairman causes controversy at Taiwanese TV station," Taiwan News, 17
\item \textsuperscript{169} "瞄準總統大選「無聲戰爭已開打」解析五毛黨擾台3招," Apple Daily, 13 September 2019, https://tw.appledaily.
com/highlight/20190912/TBGFIS25265JQ237YZ23NRC2X4/
\item \textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{171} DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Schmitt, Gary, and Michael Mazza, "Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan’s Democracy."
\item \textsuperscript{173} TTV interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Apple Daily interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
\item \textsuperscript{175} "紅色滲透 台23網媒照抄中國官媒 簡體字原封不動 同步批蔡英文 疑幕後黑手操控," Apple Daily, 12 July 2019,
\end{itemize}
came from abroad.176 Much of them were from China with simplified Chinese characters, Chinese language usages, and Chinese government propaganda.177

Obfuscate attack sources through technological, commercial, and legal means
Fifth, China obfuscates and hides its attack sources. For its cyber army accounts, their IP addresses and locations bounce to Australia, Singapore, and other places, so it is difficult for Taiwan’s national security apparatus to obtain technical proof on where the cyber information attacks originate from.178 For its "advertisements" (i.e. propaganda) in traditional media, the TAO has created companies such as Jiuzhou Culture Communication Center and Publishing Exchange Center Across the Taiwan Strait to purchase stories, according to uncovered contracts and multiple people with direct knowledge of the arrangements.179 For traditional media capture, China speaks only to compromised outlets’ top managers to prevent reporters and middle management from knowing where these directions come from.180 181 182 183 Reporters are often not even told that what they are writing are "advertisements" (i.e. 广告). Instead, they are simply directed by editors to draft these stories.184 Furthermore, when a Financial Times journalist blew the whistle on China’s influence on the Want Want Group, the group sued her and sent people to harass her, hoping to make an example out of her for anyone who wished to speak out.185 186

Make the sharp power attacks partisan
Sixth, China makes its propaganda and disinformation partisan so that many KMT supporters either do not acknowledge that there are Chinese influence operations or do not actively condemn Chinese fake news. Moreover, they often help spread these false news. All major political parties interviewed except the China-friendly KMT openly admitted that there are Chinese sharp power attacks against Taiwan, and this is likely because such at-

177 Ibid.
178 NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
179 Lee, Yimou, and I-hwa Cheng, "Paid ‘news’: China using Taiwan media to win hearts and minds on island – sources.”
180 UDN interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.
181 China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
182 TVBS interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
183 CNA interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.
185 Hille, Kathrin, “Taiwan primaries highlight fears over China’s political influence.”
186 Reporters Without Borders interview, Taipei, 1/7/20.
tacks, often anti-DPP and anti-independence, benefit the KMT politically.\textsuperscript{187} \textsuperscript{188} \textsuperscript{189} \textsuperscript{190} \textsuperscript{191} Reporters shared that since the disinformation packages are partisan, one frequently sees the KMT and pro-KMT media amplifying these packages.\textsuperscript{192} \textsuperscript{193} A clear example of the KMT's response to Chinese sharp power is its reaction in November 2019 to defected Chinese spy William Wang's claims regarding Chinese covert influence campaigns in Taiwan's elections: immediately after the Australian, Taiwanese, and international media reported on Wang's claims, the KMT rejected them, and then-KMT presidential candidate Han Kuo-yu called Wang a scammer and vowed to sue him if he were to step foot in Taiwan.\textsuperscript{194} \textsuperscript{195} Thereafter, in late December 2019, Alex Tsai (蔡正元), then-KMT deputy secretary general, worked with a China-based businessman and threatened Wang, according to Australian security agencies.\textsuperscript{196} In a series of messages, Wang was told that if he recorded a video before the presidential election saying that the DPP had bribed him into making his whistleblowing claims, he would be able to return to China or Taiwan, receive financial benefits, and ensure his family's safety; if he refused, he would be extradited to China and face death, or he would be targeted in Australia.\textsuperscript{197} \textsuperscript{198} Regardless of the veracity of Wang's claims, the KMT's response illustrates how difficult it is for a political party to recognize and condemn Chinese sharp power when the propaganda or disinformation is partisan.

**ACTORS**

Many components of the Chinese state and national security apparatus help the PRC exercise its sharp power, particularly in Taiwan and its most recent elections.\textsuperscript{199} Below is a non-exhaustive list:\textsuperscript{200}

- **Cyberspace Administration of China** (i.e. the Office of the Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs): Headed by Xi, this supra-ministerial policy and coordina-
tion body worked with the Central Propaganda Department to create a working group on Taiwan.201

» Central Propaganda Department: This department is cited as having a professional cybergroup to influence Taiwanese elections and providing compromised Taiwanese outlets with content for them to write positive stories about China.202

» United Front Work Department: This department is traditionally tasked with influencing foreign individuals and organizations.204 It also works extensively in Hong Kong.205

» People’s Liberation Army's Strategic Support Force: The Taiwanese government is confident that this force is behind many "troll factories" and "content farms" that are spreading Chinese propaganda and disinformation in Taiwan.206

» State Council’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO): Through uncovered, signed contracts between the TAO and compromised Taiwanese outlets, Reuters found that the TAO is paying these companies for coverage.207

» Provinces: Reuters found that municipal governments and provincial TAOs also sponsor Chinese propaganda in Taiwanese news organizations, based on interviews and uncovered financial documents.208

» 50-Cent Party (五毛黨): The party consists primarily of government employees paid by the Chinese government to create posts on a part-time basis outside their normal jobs.209 Its aim is to counter government criticism and prevent collective action through strategic distraction and censorship.210 It operates by

201 Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
202 Kassam, Natasha, “China Has Lost Taiwan, and It Knows It.”
203 Lee, Yimou, and I-hwa Cheng, "Paid ‘news’: China using Taiwan media to win hearts and minds on island – sources.”
204 沈伯洋, 黃祥儒, “深度評論：我站在2020大選網路戰最前線.”
207 Lee, Yimou, and I-hwa Cheng, "Paid ‘news’: China using Taiwan media to win hearts and minds on island – sources.”
208 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
inserting pro-Chinese government comments into online conversations.\textsuperscript{211} The party produces 448 million posts annually, with the aim of overwhelming the information system.\textsuperscript{212} It is accused of interfering in Taiwan’s 2018 and 2020 elections.\textsuperscript{213}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Chinese content farms: Farms that operate on Taiwan include 密訊 (one of the most shared in Taiwan), 觸極者, 每日頭條, 壹讀, 觀察哲網, and Buzz Orange.\textsuperscript{214, 215}
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Local collaborators: China also employs local intermediaries, Chinese firms established in Taiwan, and online Taiwanese celebrities (網紅/網美) as conduits for its sharp power work.\textsuperscript{217, 218, 219, 220}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{212} Harvard University Dr. Gary King interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/19/19.
\textsuperscript{213} Cole, J Michael, “Chinese Interference in Taiwan’s Elections is Part of a Two-Pronged Attack on Democracy.”
\textsuperscript{214} NSC interview, Taipei, 1/8/20.
\textsuperscript{215} Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
\textsuperscript{216} 孔德廉, 柯皓翔, 劉致昕, 許家瑜, “打不死的內容農場——揭開「密訊」背後操盤手和中國因素.”
\textsuperscript{217} Cardenal, Juan P., et al., “Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence.”
\textsuperscript{218} Cole, J Michael, “Chinese Interference in Taiwan’s Elections is Part of a Two-Pronged Attack on Democracy.”
\textsuperscript{219} 沈伯洋, 黃祥儒, “深度評論：我站在2020大選網路戰最前線.”
\textsuperscript{220} Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
EFFECTS ON THE 2020 ELECTIONS

NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE ELECTION RESULTS
Despite how serious of a threat Chinese sharp power is, Taiwan was able to blunt its impact on the 2020 elections. All interviewees said that Chinese influence operations this time had little effect on the election results.\(^\text{221}\) They observed that compared to the 2018 local elections, the 2020 elections saw significantly fewer Chinese and general propaganda and disinformation packages. The interviewees added that most propaganda and disinformation stories were unable to inflict maximum damage, as they were swiftly exposed and debunked. All four major political parties (DPP, KMT, TPP, NPP) stated that Chinese sharp power did not affect their polling numbers and election results.\(^\text{222} \quad \text{223} \quad \text{224} \quad \text{225}\) If one of China’s objectives was to elect a China-friendly president and legislature, then Beijing failed in that regard. On January 11, 2020, Tsai was reelected with a historic 8.17 million votes (57.13 percent) (see Exhibit B).\(^\text{226}\) In the legislature, the ruling DPP retained its majority with 61 out of 113 seats. Turn-out increased as well, with 74.90 percent of eligible voters voting, compared to 66.27 percent in 2016.

Exhibit B:
Tsai defeated Han by over 18.5 percent (2.648 million votes) (Photo: Bloomberg).

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\(^{221}\) This statement excludes interviewees without knowledge and understanding of Taiwan’s 2020 elections.

\(^{222}\) DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.

\(^{223}\) KMT interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.

\(^{224}\) TPP interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.

\(^{225}\) NPP interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.

SOME EFFECT ON POLARIZATION AND GENERATIONAL DIVIDES

However, Chinese sharp power did worsen political and social polarization and widen the generational divide to a certain extent.\textsuperscript{227}\textsuperscript{228} It made political and social bubbles 調溫層 more difficult to pop, increased mutual suspicion between the KMT and the DPP, and strengthened conservatives’ and the KMT base’s disdain for Tsai.\textsuperscript{229} \textsuperscript{230} \textsuperscript{231} Generationally, Chinese actions included infiltrating a Facebook support group page for young people whose parents voted for Han in order to move young people’s political positions further away from their parents.\textsuperscript{232} In terms of media, it further split the informational space, one for the pro-China side and the other for the anti-China side.\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{227} Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
\textsuperscript{228} NPP interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\textsuperscript{229} UDN interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.
\textsuperscript{230} Dr. Yi-Suo Tzeng interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
\textsuperscript{231} Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
\textsuperscript{232} Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
\textsuperscript{233} UDN interview, Taipei, 1/13/20.
COMBATTING AND DEFEATING CHINESE SHARP POWER: A WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY ENDEAVOR

How did Taiwan, the country ranked most exposed to foreign disinformation globally, survive, combat, and defeat China’s information attacks? The answer is that after being inundated and overwhelmed by Chinese propaganda and disinformation in the 2018 midterm elections, Taiwan embarked on a whole-of-government, whole-of-society (i.e. civil society, private sector) mission in 2019 and 2020 to defend against such attacks.

GOVERNMENT

After the 2018 electoral losses, the government realized that it had to communicate with the public more effectively, better explain its activities and actions on a regular basis, and build more trust with its citizenry. Rooted in these aims, the government started countering propaganda and disinformation in five main ways: 1) monitoring traditional and social media constantly, 2) debunking falsehoods efficiently and effectively using information-spreading strategies, 3) raising awareness of sharp power through a public health narrative, 4) creating and enforcing laws to punish sharp power actors, and 5) working with other countries to jointly address the foreign propaganda and disinformation issue.

Monitor media around the clock

To improve internal coordination, the ruling DPP created a cross-government and DPP communication group that searches for propaganda and disinformation around the clock. This social media group analyzes where the online political discussions are going (風向) and how information is disseminated and consumed on the internet. Once someone finds a fake news story, top officials determine its validity and harm. It is then a judgment call on whether to respond. The two must-respond criteria are if the fake news story is reported on television and if there are many online engagements with that story.

234 孔德廉, 柯皓翔, 劉致昕, 許家瑜, “打不死的內容農場──揭開「密訊」後台操盤手和中國因素.”
236 Ibid.
237 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
238 PO interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid.
If they decide to respond, then they will delegate the debunking to the most appropriate agency or authority.  

**Debunk falsehoods using information-spreading strategies**

Once the government moves to the debunking stage, the race to win the narrative begins. The debunking criteria are that the response has to be fast, short, easily understandable, humorous, high level, and easily spreadable. First, the government releases a press statement providing the accurate information. Second, it uploads a debunking meme on its social media pages. The government chooses to deliver the correct information through a meme (see Exhibit C) because it is short, funny, easy to understand, and easy to share, all qualities that online viral content share. The reasoning behind the humor requirement is twofold: one, humor and outrage are two mutually exclusive outlets of anger, so the government uses humor to prevent and disarm outrage. Two, humor attracts young netizens, who can then share the meme with their less media-literate family members, and according to the trusted messenger theory, people tend to accept clarifications more from those they trust. Third, the government asks its online followers and supporters to share the meme as broadly as possible. Fourth, if the fake news is severe, the appropriate government minister will host a high-level press conference to draw on traditional media’s reach and debunk the falsehood. The goal of these steps is to make the clarification propagate faster and farther than the fake news story, for facts to dominate the information space before falsehoods do. The government aims to give the public an information "immunization shot" by

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242 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
243 PO interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
244 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
245 Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
246 Ibid.
247 PO interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
248 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
249 Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
250 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.

Exhibit C: In this meme, Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang debunks fake news about the Anti-Infiltration Act (Su’s Facebook page, 1/15/20).
preempting fake news with accurate ones so that people are exposed to the truth before learning about the falsehood.251

Thus far, the government has been successful.252 253 It sets an ambitious goal of responding in two hours, but many of its ministries have been able to do so in only 60 minutes.254 255 Because the government times its clarification with the news cycle, its response is reported by traditional media.256 As for reach, journalists interviewed shared that they generally do not hear about a fake news story until they see the government’s response, and Facebook stated that the government’s debunking responses spread more broadly than fake news on its platform.257 In this way, the government has the potential to overcome the familiarity bias trap (i.e. repeating a false claim strengthens the claim) because people hear the facts before they are exposed to the falsehoods.258

**Raise awareness of fake news through a public health lens**

Besides reactively countering fake news, the Tsai administration has been actively raising public awareness of both general and Chinese propaganda and disinformation. On the general side, the approach is a public health one. The government is trying to build the public mindset that fake news is simply a virus and that people who believe and share it are not bad people; rather, they simply caught the virus.259 Anyone can catch and spread the virus, so everyone should work together to detect and prevent its spread.260 This framing takes away the good-bad binary from fake news and thereby removes fake news’ polarization effect.261 There is no shame or blame for being tricked by it or spreading it because anyone can be a victim.262 From here, the focus shifts to education. The government has been driving media literacy trucks to rural places to conduct workshops on how to identify fake news for citizens with less media experience (often older people), similar to what misinformation expert Dr. Matthew Baum describes as targeted interventions to subgroups.263 264 On the Chinese fake news issue specifically, the ruling DPP proposed and passed the Anti-Infiltration Bill before the elections primarily to warn the public about the ongoing, malicious foreign activities occurring in its midst.265

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251 Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
252 Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
253 Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
254 Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
255 PO interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
256 Ibid.
257 Facebook Taiwan interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
258 Baum interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/12/19.
259 Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
260 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
262 Ibid.
263 PO interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
264 Baum interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/12/19.
265 PO interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
Draft and enforce laws to deter and punish sharp power activities

There are three other reasons for passing the now Anti-Infiltration Law: to deter Chinese interference in the upcoming elections, react to defected Chinese spy Wang's revelations on Chinese sharp power activities, and frame the elections as a referendum on Chinese penetration into Taiwan.\[266\] The law states that if any person or entity receives support from "overseas hostile forces" in donations, in an election or referendum, in lobbying, and in disrupting assembly, that person or entity will face imprisonment of up to five years and fines of up to 335,000 dollars (ten million NTD).\[267\] So far, it appears to be having an effect. Immediately after it became law, Master Chain (大師鏈), the only Taiwanese media that had an office in China, criticized the law, closed its Taiwan operations, and relocated to Beijing.\[268\] Furthermore, Want Want Group's top media managers are now worried about how the law will affect them.\[269\] Separately, the NCC has been more strictly enforcing Taiwan's factual and balanced reporting regulation for television and radio. For example, Want Want Group's CTi TV was fined over 186,000 dollars (5.63 million NTD) in 2019 mostly for broadcasting and spreading falsehoods (see Exhibit D).\[270\] Combined with the public rally against their biases, Want Want Group's outlets have been relatively more balanced in their reporting since.\[271\]

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**Exhibit D:** A partial list of reasons CTi TV was fined by the NCC in 2019; many were for reporting falsehoods (NCC, 1/15/20).

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\[269\] China Times interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.

\[270\] "去年被罰600萬！中天電視遭舉報造謠 NCC再度開罰60萬," Yahoo News, 15 January 2020, https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E5%8E%BB%E5%B9%B4%E8%A2%AB%E7%BD%B0%E6%80%80%E9%9A%AC-%E4%8B%AD%E5%A4%A9%E9%9B%88%E6%96%84%E9%81%AD%E6%AA%A2%E8%88%88%E9%80%80%E8%AC%A0-ncc%E5%86-8D%E5%BA%A6%E9%96%BB%E7%BD%B0%E8%90%AC-082900734.html.

\[271\] Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
Cooperate internationally to jointly combat Chinese propaganda and disinformation

Taiwan has little space to maneuver internationally, but Chinese sharp power has helped Taiwan gain global attention and given the island an opportunity to better cooperate with other countries on the common challenge of Chinese influence operations. Because other states are now concerned about Chinese sharp power in their countries, they are looking to Taiwan for the expertise in addressing it. Chinese sharp power additionally has helped Taiwan highlight its shared democratic values with likeminded countries. Thus, through the Global Cooperation and Training Framework programs on disinformation and media literacy, Taipei has been able to share its know-how with other states and further cooperation with the US.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Facebook and LINE, two main disinformation hotbeds in Taiwan, were also crucial in combatting Chinese sharp power through their numerous advances over 2019.

Facebook

Facebook does not have a policy that everything on its platform has to be true, but it does remove content and accounts that violate its community standards, hide content that breaks local laws, and downgrade fake news, and Facebook actively did all three during the election season. In both October and December 2019, Facebook removed hundreds of accounts and content farms for breaking community standards by engaging in abusive audience building. Specifically in the December 13 case, as part of the effort to protect Taiwan’s election integrity, Facebook removed 118 fan pages, 99 groups, and 51 duplicate accounts for "artificially inflating their posts' reach." Facebook also cooperated closely with Taiwan’s Central Election Commission during the election period to remove voter suppression content (e.g. false election information that could suppress votes) and hide posts that broke Taiwanese electoral laws. Moreover, Facebook worked, and continues to work, with a third-party fact-checking organization (i.e. Taiwan Fact Check Center) to downrank false information. Operating independently, the center rates Facebook...
content for its validity. If it rates a post as false or mixed, then it downranks that post. Once it is downranked, users will no longer be passively exposed to its false information. A user can still actively find this post, but the post will then have the correct information (provided by the center) attached to it.\footnote{283}

One of Facebook’s greatest contributions to countering Chinese sharp power during the elections was establishing an Election Operation Center, or the "war room."\footnote{284} Its objective was to ensure the elections’ integrity by rooting out disinformation, monitoring false news, and deleting fake accounts as quickly as possible.\footnote{285}\footnote{286} Whereas before this work would require waiting for teams in Dublin and Silicon Valley to go online and take action (due to the different time zones), the war room brought together Facebook’s policy, legal, and security representatives; content moderators; and local experts on politics, elections, and law, so they could meet face to face and expedite the decision-making process on what accounts to delete and what fake news to downrank/\textit{remove}.\footnote{287} In addition, the war room operated 24/7 because of Facebook Dublin’s and Silicon Valley’s support.\footnote{288} Facebook found the war room effective, and Dr. Puma Shen, Taiwan's top Chinese sharp power professor, stated that the war room was one of the key reasons why Chinese propaganda and disinformation did not have much effect on Taiwan's elections this time.\footnote{289}\footnote{290} Shen explained that the war room was able to block a significant amount of foreign-produced fake news, making the information environment much better than that of the 2018 elections.\footnote{291}

\textbf{LINE}

LINE, the Japanese equivalent to WhatsApp, is arguably the most important social media application in Taiwan. It has 21 million monthly active users on an island of only around 24 million people.\footnote{292} 9.3 billion LINE messages are sent every day in Taiwan, and each Taiwanese user receives over 100 daily messages on average.\footnote{293} Fake news runs rampant on the application, and its end-to-end encryption makes it extremely difficult to track the spread and origins of fake news.\footnote{294} However, it announced the "LINE Digital Responsibility Plan"
(「LINE數位當責計劃」)(see Exhibit E) in March 2019 and worked with Taiwan’s executive branch and four NGOs to create the "LINE information checker" portal in July 2019, right in time for the elections.295 Whenever users find questionable information on LINE, they can forward it to the portal and receive a fact-checking report created by these NGOs. As of January 7, 2020, four days before the elections, it had fact-checked over 30,000 suspicious news/stories sent by 140,000 users, and its debunking page had been viewed over four million times.296

CIVIL SOCIETY

Shocked by the overwhelming force of PRC propaganda and disinformation in the 2018 elections, the Taiwanese public became more alert to the problem and began engaging in activism and organizational-building to counter Chinese sharp power.297 For example, its activism work culminated in the Anti-Red Media March (red refers to the CCP’s color) (see Exhibit F) in June 2019, when 20,000 people rallied against compromised Tai-

Exhibit E: The "LINE Digital Responsibility Plan" has three components to combatting fake news: halting falsehoods through users’ reporting of possible fake news, diffusing facts by working with partners on fact-checking, and preventing users from being tricked through societal media literacy programs (trans., LINE, 1/7/20).

Exhibit F: Demonstrators rallying against "red media" in front of Taiwan’s Presidential Office on June 23, 2019 (Photo: Hsu Tsun-hsu/AFP via Getty Images).

295 LINE written response, Taipei, 1/7/20.
296 Ibid.
297 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
 Taiwanese civil society also made strides in building organizations that drastically decreased disinformation during the 2020 elections. First, in terms of fact-checking, civil society organizations Taiwan Fact Check Center (TFCC), MyGoPen, Cofacts (真的假的), and Rum Toast (蘭姆酒吐司) have been working with Facebook and LINE since 2019 to identify, verify, and downrank dubious posts. These groups also have been working with the Taiwanese government to obtain accurate, up-to-date information quickly. Because of the amount of disinformation, groups such as Cofacts and Watchout have been using crowdsourcing and bots for rapid fact-checking and response. Their hard work paid off.

299 LT interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
300 PO interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
301 DPP interview, Taipei, 1/14/20.
302 Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
303 Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
304 Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
305 Han, Kirsten, "Line is another chat app rife with spam, scams, and bad information. The volunteer-supported Cofacts is fact-checking them in the open," Nieman Lab, 21 August 2018, https://www.niemanlab.org/2018/08/
off; Dr. Puma Shen credited them, as well as Double Think Labs, for blocking Chinese disinformation and dulling Chinese sharp power’s effects in the 2020 elections.\textsuperscript{306} Second, for attribution work, the TFCC has been able to trace disinformation packages back to the Chinese government (in its investigation number 204 for example), helping convince the public that Chinese infiltration operations are alive and well.\textsuperscript{307} Third, Double Think Labs is now conducting a study through surveys and focus groups to attempt to estimate the effects of fake news on the 2020 voters and their decisions.\textsuperscript{308}

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR: THE 2019 HONG KONG PROTESTS ON THE FUGITIVE EXTRADITION BILL

In addition to its whole-of-society mobilization, Taiwan was helped by the situation in Hong Kong. On the Chinese side, due to the worsening Hong Kong-mainland relationship, Beijing and its cyber army were focused on influencing Hong Kong’s municipal elections, which took place a month and a half before Taiwan’s elections. Chinese propaganda and disinformation in Taiwan, on YouTube, for example, decreased sizably as a result.\textsuperscript{309} 310 On the Taiwanese side, Hong Kong government responses to the Hong Kong protests (see

Exhibit H: One of the many demonstrations protesting the Hong Kong government’s fugitive extradition bill and Hong Kong’s dwindling autonomy (Photo: Danish Siddiqui/Reuters).

\begin{footnotesize}
306 Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
308 Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
309 Ibid.
310 Dr. Yi-Suo Tzeng interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
\end{footnotesize}
Exhibit H) made Taiwanese citizens realize the dangers of Chinese encroachment and penetration.\(^{311}\) This realization made people more aware of Chinese sharp power and made the elections increasingly about national security and sovereignty.\(^{312}\) Disinformation thrives on polarization, and because the elections were no longer about divisive domestic issues, and because Chinese hostilities in Hong Kong united a large majority of the Taiwanese citizenry—even those who do not support independence—against closer ties with Beijing, the effects of Chinese sharp power were blunted.\(^{313}\) \(^{314}\) \(^{315}\)

**WORD OF CAUTION**

While Taiwan was successful in defeating Chinese sharp power, there could be potential for the government and society to over-politicize and overreact to the issue. The Taiwanese government was effective in raising awareness of Chinese information infiltration, but China expert Shelley Rigger observed that the DPP also used Chinese sharp power operations to build the narrative that citizens should vote for the DPP because it is the only party that can protect Taiwan's freedom, sovereignty, and democracy against Beijing.\(^{316}\) \(^{317}\) It painted a binary of the DPP and the CCP. Thus, the KMT, Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), and New Power Party (NPP) (three main opposition parties) asserted that the DPP and its supporters sought to "smear them as red" (抹紅) during the campaign.\(^{318}\) \(^{319}\) \(^{320}\) \(^{321}\) DPP supporters accused the NPP, a pro-independence party, of being red because the NPP did not fully agree with the DPP’s procedures in passing the Anti-Infiltration Bill, and they charged that the TPP is red because the China Central Television aired a profile on TPP leader Ko Wen-je.\(^{322}\) \(^{323}\) Moreover, in this binary, people are starting to paint blue (KMT’s color) as red, and China-friendly as pro-China and pro-unification.\(^{324}\) While it does not seem to be the case yet, there could be a point at which parties and people begin to label a view or person as red to end a debate, an act antithetical to the democracy and freedom that Taiwan holds dear.

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\(^{311}\) NPP interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\(^{312}\) Rigger interview, Taipei, 1/6/20.
\(^{313}\) Baum interview, Cambridge, MA, 12/12/19.
\(^{314}\) Minister Audrey Tang interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\(^{315}\) Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
\(^{316}\) Rigger interview, Taipei, 1/6/20.
\(^{319}\) KMT interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
\(^{320}\) TPP interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\(^{321}\) NPP interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
\(^{322}\) Ibid.
\(^{323}\) TPP interview, Taipei, 1/16/20.
\(^{324}\) Storm Media interview, Taipei, 1/17/20.
WHY SHOULD THE US CARE?

With a better understanding of what Chinese sharp power is (i.e. actors, tactics, effects) and how to defeat it, the US can further protect its elections domestically and defend its partners, image, and values internationally.

Domestically, the US can take steps to secure its information space and elections against Chinese influence operations. As the two great powers become increasingly competitive against one another, it would not be surprising to see China launch extensive information campaigns to distort truths, sow confusion, deepen polarization, and disrupt democracy from within American society. Taiwan is a testing ground for China to perfect its sharp power capabilities.\(^\text{325}\) Just as Russia tried its influence campaigns in Ukraine first before launching them in the US in the 2016 elections, China could do the same.\(^\text{326}\) In fact, similar to what it is doing in Australia, Beijing is already influencing Chinese Americans and Taiwanese Americans through controlling Chinese-language media outlets in the US.\(^\text{327}\)\(^\text{328}\)\(^\text{329}\) As the American government and society prepare for the impending Russian sharp power attacks in the 2020 elections, they should consider the impact of sharp power from not one but two great powers.

Internationally, the US can protect its partners, its image, and its values in third countries. While China is investing in BRI infrastructure projects worldwide, it is also purchasing stakes of media companies in BRI countries.\(^\text{330}\) With such financial control, Beijing can influence these outlets’ reporting.\(^\text{331}\) For example, it can silence stories on the human rights abuses in Xinjiang and on people’s negative experiences with Chinese infrastructure projects.\(^\text{332}\) As many BRI states are US allies and partners, America should help them guard against Chinese media infiltration. The US can and should do this because Chinese propaganda and disinformation in third countries can be directed at America as well. For example, during Taiwan’s 2020 elections, Chinese propaganda and disinformation argued that Taiwan is just a chess piece to the US, that the US is an unreliable partner, that US President Donald Trump may sell out Taiwan, and that the US is meddling in Chinese internal affairs with its stance on Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Taiwan Strait.
Finally, the US can use lessons learned from Taiwan to defend its values in other countries. Beijing believes that journalism serves the government and not the people, that democratic values (such as the current global conception of human rights) are only "Western values," and that democratic rule is ineffective, and it is using sharp power in third countries to push these beliefs. In a competition to see who can reshape the world order, including what that order stands for and values, the US must be in the race and combat the ways China advocates for its beliefs.

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333 Schmitt, Gary, and Michael Mazza, "Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan's Democracy."
334 Reporters Without Borders interview, Taipei, 1/7/20.
336 Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
337 Rolland, Nadege, "China's counteroffensive in the war of ideas."
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this report’s findings on Chinese sharp power in Taiwan’s 2020 elections, the author gives the 12 policy recommendations below for the US State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC) to better understand, identify, combat, and defeat Chinese and other foreign propaganda and disinformation for the US and its partners and allies. They are ordered by the level of importance (least [1] to most [12]) and implementation ease (easiest [1] to hardest [12]), taking into consideration time, budgetary resources, human resources, the level of bureaucratic approval, and the extent of inter-office, interagency coordination.

1. Create a database of propaganda and disinformation experts around the world and track their research findings: Effective policies should be based on sound information, but the problem with crafting policies to counter sharp power currently is that this field is still emerging and information is lacking. However, different countries, such as Taiwan, have had a plethora of experiences researching fake news and experimenting with counter policies. By building this database, the GEC can close this information gap, accumulate these countries’ knowledge and best practices, and use them as a foundation for counter-sharp-power strategies. The GEC can begin to implement this by working with regional bureaus to task US missions to collect this data in their respective countries.

2. Cooperate with the State Department’s special envoy on countering China’s UN influence to understand and combat Chinese efforts to use propaganda and disinformation to reshape international norms and values: China has long been using propaganda and disinformation to paint global human rights standards as Western, imperialist, and anti-sovereignty in international fora. The US, along with its democratic allies, should have a strategy to counter such operations to win the battle of ideas against authoritarianism. The GEC and the special envoy can start by tracking and documenting sharp power actions at the UN to better understand their nature and aims.

3. Draw from the Taiwanese government’s debunking strategy to create a State Department standard operating procedure (SOP) for responding to foreign propaganda and disinformation: From accusing America of orchestrating the Hong Kong protests against the fugitive extradition bill to alleging that the US military brought the coronavirus to Wuhan, the Chinese government, alongside countless other foreign entities, is frequently spreading disinformation against the US and its foreign...
activities. The State Department should thus debunk and disarm such disinformation to protect America's image abroad by crafting an SOP response based on the characteristics of Taiwan's debunking strategy. These include being fast, short, high level, easily understandable, and easily spreadable. These characteristics will help the State Department propagate its message and dominate the international information space before disinformation against the US does.

4. **Conduct "combatting foreign propaganda and disinformation" workshops with Public Affairs Bureau officers so that they can react quickly and efficiently when attacks occur:** As the Taiwanese government has shown, responding to sharp power is an art even with an SOP in place. It is always a judgment call on if, when, and how it responds. Therefore, the GEC should host workshops and tabletop exercises for Public Affairs Bureau officers to teach them how to best respond efficiently and effectively without GEC support every time. For example, the GEC can explain to officers that the headline and first sentence of a debunking statement should be on the truth, not on the fake news, to avoid helping the fake news spread. It could also bring in experts such as Dr. Joan Donovan to help officers understand the nature of propaganda and disinformation and how they spread and infiltrate.

5. **Require each diplomatic mission to submit an SOP for responding to propaganda and disinformation against the US in its host country for the GEC's approval:** Because the State Department in Washington does not have the capacity to respond to every significant piece of disinformation against the US, and because not every piece of disinformation merits a response as high level as the State Department's, each mission should have its own SOP for rapidly and effectively countering sharp power against the US in its host country. Each SOP should be tailored to the host country's cultural and informational environments, as the audience is not the international community—like the State Department's—but that country's people and media. In this way, each mission will be able to reclaim America's narrative in its host country and not allow others to reshape America's image.

6. **Add monitoring and reporting on Chinese propaganda and disinformation operations globally to the State Department’s regional China watchers’ portfolio:** There is currently little systematic and consistent monitoring of Chinese influence operations abroad, so the State Department does not have a full picture of the problem. Without understanding the issue's severity, it cannot build sufficient and sound policy options. Foggy Bottom can address this by tasking its regional China watchers to

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document the trends and characteristics of Beijing’s propaganda and disinformation campaigns in different regions. With the collected information, the GEC can then help craft a whole-of-government strategy to counter Chinese sharp power.

7. **Add monitoring and reporting on propaganda and disinformation against the US in the host country to the portfolio of each mission’s information officer:** The Taiwan case study shows that Chinese influence operations adapt to each country’s political and informational environments and infiltrate accordingly. Similar to Russia’s, Chinese operations exploit existing weaknesses in the target country’s media ecosystem and widen the societal divides that are already present. Thus, recognizing that sharp power activities against the US look differently in each country, each mission should task its information officer and media team to analyze and report on such activities, as well as provide recommendations for countermeasures. In this way, each mission can have a strategic communication counterstrategy that is both targeted and focused.

8. **Host a conference that brings together relevant civil societies, businesses, NGOs, and government agencies worldwide to brainstorm ways to combat propaganda and disinformation and exchange best practices:** Every country struggles with foreign sharp power, and every country understands and confronts this problem differently. In Taiwan, instead of focusing on regulating the platforms, it has focused on crowdsourced fact-checking, rapid government debunking, and raising media literacy for susceptible groups (e.g., the elderly). Through this conference, the State Department can draw from knowledge around the world, create networks that can help expedite learning on this issue, and provide a forum where ideas and insights can build on one another to create innovative counter policies. The State Department should pay special attention to what democratic societies are doing and how they defend against sharp power while still respecting, and even using, liberal ideals such as transparency and individual rights protection.

9. **Host a high-level conference or ministerial on propaganda and disinformation to highlight the issue’s severity and find ways for America and its allies and partners to jointly address the problem:** Many smaller countries (e.g., less-developed ones in the BRI) may feel powerless against influence operations from larger states such as China and Russia. The Taiwanese government shared that partnerships with the US and other countries have made it realize that it is not alone in this fight and given it the confidence to rise and resist Chinese sharp power. By hosting this conference, the US can accomplish several objectives: highlight to the world how widespread and detrimental authoritarian sharp power is; show its allies and partners that the US is

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with them in this battle; signal to China, Russia, and its other competitors that the US will deploy resources to meet this challenge; and demonstrate America’s global leadership on this issue.

10. **Contract NGOs and businesses to monitor for propaganda and disinformation against the US in each country through its diplomatic missions:** The Taiwanese government’s media monitoring group reveals that identifying propaganda and disinformation and their impacts requires knowing what the local culture and media ecosystem are, how information travels through that ecosystem, and how content becomes viral in that system. US diplomats and their local staff may not have the expertise and bandwidth to acquire that knowledge, so each mission can fill that knowledge and time gap by contracting local entities to identify and assess the propaganda and disinformation packages against the US in its host country. This information will be helpful to each mission in reporting on the problem and recommending policies to address it.

11. **Work with intelligence agencies (e.g. the National Security Agency, the Treasury Department’s Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Office, and the State Department’s Intelligence and Research Bureau) to identify which entities are launching these propaganda and disinformation attacks against the US and its allies and partners:**

   Taiwanese experts on Chinese sharp power stated that many countries like Taiwan do not have the intelligence capabilities to attribute foreign attacks and uncover operations. As a result, aggressors can claim plausible deniability. The GEC can receive support requests from American partners through US missions and work with the intelligence community to help them identify these attacks and their aggressors. By doing so, the US can show its allies and partners who their real friends and adversaries are.

12. **Work with the US Treasury Department and other State Department sanctions bureaus to sanction these entities (see point 11) so that they cannot hire local agents and intermediaries in target countries to create and amplify their desired propaganda and disinformation:** Propaganda and disinformation are often created and spread not by the attacking entities, but local intermediaries funded by these entities. In Taiwan’s case, these intermediaries are compromised media outlets. To stem

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342 Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang interview, Taipei, 1/15/20.
343 Journalist Chih-Te Lee interview, Taipei, 1/20/20.
the funding, the GEC can work with the Treasury Department and other State Department bureaus to sanction these entities. This will limit their financial reach and their ability to recruit locals in targeted countries to do their bidding. Without local knowledge, expertise, and support, these attacks will likely be easier to identify and less effective in manipulating public opinion and discourse.

345 Dr. Puma Shen interview, Taipei, 1/21/20.
APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES

**Academia**
Dr. Gary King, Harvard University
Dr. Jaw-Nian Huang (黃兆年), National Chengchi University
Dr. Joan Donovan, Harvard University
Dr. Kai-Ping Huang (黃凱苹), National Taiwan University
Dr. Lawrence Reardon, University of New Hampshire
Dr. Matthew Baum, Harvard University
Dr. Puma Shen (沈伯洋), National Taipei University
Dr. Robert Ross, Boston College
Dr. Shelley Rigger, Davidson College
Dr. Steven Goldstein, Harvard University
Professor on China, anonymous, Harvard University
Senior Journalist Chih-Te Lee (李志德), National Taiwan University

**News media**
- **Online**
  - Central News Agency (state-owned)
  - Foreign journalist #1
  - Foreign journalist #2
  - News Lens
  - Storm Media
- **Print (the four main newspapers)**
  - Apple Daily
  - China Times (2)
  - Liberty Times
  - United Daily News
- **Television**
  - SET
  - TTV
  - TVBS

**Politics**
- Democratic Progressive Party (ruling party)
- Kuomintang (main opposition party)
- New Power Party (4th largest party) (2)
- President Tsai’s re-election campaign
- Taiwan People’s Party (3rd largest party)

**Civil society**
Dr. Yi-Suo Tzeng (曾怡碩), Taiwan Institute for National Defense and Security Research
National Endowment for Democracy
Reporters Without Borders, Taiwan

**Private sector**
Facebook
LINE

**Government**
Audrey Tang, Taiwan’s Digital Minister
Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Taiwan’s National Communications Commission
Taiwan’s National Security Council
Taiwan’s Presidential Office

Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation
APPENDIX B: GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General questions for experts
Are there sharp power attacks from China?
When did the attacks start?
How do you detect Chinese sharp power?
Is China meeting its objectives?
What other traditional and new media outlets are compromised?
Was there learning from Russia? Any evidence?
What were the effects of Chinese sharp power on Taiwan's 2018 elections?
Did they launch sharp power campaigns on the 2020 elections? How do you know?
What were the aims of Chinese sharp power in Taiwan's 2020 elections? Did it succeed?
What were the tools of Chinese sharp power in Taiwan's 2020 elections?
What were the effects of Chinese sharp power in Taiwan's 2020 elections?
What are the differences between Taiwan's 2018 and 2020 elections, in terms of Chinese sharp power attacks?
Why should the US care? How can the US help?

General questions for parties
How does your party view Chinese propaganda and disinformation?
What is your party's policies on Chinese propaganda and disinformation? On propaganda and disinformation in general?
Was your party a target of Chinese propaganda and disinformation in the 2020 elections? What about general propaganda and disinformation? If so, what were the attacks? What did they look like?
How did your party respond? Were the responses effective?
Do you think your party's election results were affected by Chinese propaganda and disinformation? If so, how?
Was your party a target of Chinese propaganda and disinformation since its founding? Of general propaganda and disinformation?
Lessons learned on Chinese propaganda and disinformation?

General questions for reporters
What are some weaknesses in Taiwan's media ecosystem?
How do you view the Want Want Media Group case? Do you believe that the Taiwan Affairs Office regularly gives editorial orders to those under Want Want?
How do you view the lawsuit against CNA and Financial Times from Want Want?
What are other types and cases of Chinese infiltration in Taiwan's media space?
Are there cases of it in the online media space?
Why are journalists, especially those in compromised companies, not speaking up?
What have been the effects of Chinese media infiltration on journalism in Taiwan? How are journalists themselves fighting back against Chinese media infiltration? How do journalists view the Anti-Infiltration Bill? Why do they view it like that?
### APPENDIX C: TAIWANESE OUTLETS’ POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFILIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro-DPP (green camp)</th>
<th>&quot;Red media&quot; (accused)</th>
<th>Less partisan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» <em>Liberty Times</em> (自由時報)</td>
<td>» <em>China Times</em> (中國時報)</td>
<td>» <em>Apple Daily</em> (蘋果日報)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Formosa TV (民視)</td>
<td>» Want Daily (旺報)</td>
<td>» Era TV (年代)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» SET (三立)</td>
<td>» CTi TV (中天)</td>
<td>» Next TV (壹電視)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro-KMT (blue camp)</th>
<th>Publicly owned</th>
<th>Wire Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wire Service</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» <em>United Daily News</em> (聯合報)</td>
<td>» <em>Public Television Service</em> (公視)</td>
<td>» <em>Central News Agency</em> (中央社)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» ETTV (東森)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» TVBS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Storm Media (風傳媒)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Publicly owned</strong></th>
<th><strong>Wire Service</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
<td><strong>Website</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» CTS (華視)</td>
<td>» <em>Central News Agency</em> (中央社)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Public Television Service (公視)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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346 Based on interviews with journalists and government officials.
APPENDIX D: TAIWAN’S MOST ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN 2018

MOST ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS
PERCENTAGE OF INTERNET USERS WHO REPORT USING EACH PLATFORM (SURVEY BASED)

- YouTube: 90%
- Facebook: 89%
- Line: 84%
- FB Messenger: 57%
- Instagram: 49%
- WeChat: 32%
- Skype: 25%
- Twitter: 24%
- ENTV: 22%
- WhatsApp: 19%
- Sina Weibo: 18%
- LinkedIn: 14%
- Twitch: 13%
- Tencent Weibo: 12%
- Tumblr: 11%
- Mixux: 10%

SOCIAL NETWORK
MESSENGER / VOIP

SOURCE: GIGAOM/WE ARE SOCIAL (Q2 & Q3 2018) FIGURES REPRESENT THE FINDINGS OF A SURVEY OF INTERNET USERS AGED 16-64.
APPENDIX E: SALIENT CHINESE PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION EXAMPLES

The author collected these examples during his two-month (November 2019 to January 2020) media monitoring of outlets with suspected Chinese government ties.

Against defected Chinese spy William Wang

Figure 1: “Victim of William Wang exposing him as a fraud” (Want Daily, 12/30/19)

Figure 2: “Global Times’ exclusive discovery: Xiang Xin does not know William Wang” (Want Daily, 11/29/19).

Figure 3: “Mainland media publishing video showing William Wang’s fraud case court trial” (Want Daily, 11/28/19).

Figure 4: "Fake CCP spy case, the Green camp gets hit in the face" (Want Daily, 11/25/19).

Figure 5: "From Global Times, William Wang defrauds money, kneels and begs for forgiveness afterward" (China Times, 2019).

Figure 6: "Australian media: CCP spy case a farce" (China Times, 12/1/19).

Figure 7: "Mainland media publishes court case video, William Wang case: fraudster becomes spy" (China Times, 11/28/19).

Figure 8: "A Ponzi scheme" (re Chinese spy defection case) (China Times, 11/24/19).

Figure 9: "CCP spy case, a Western intelligence manipulation" (China Times, 11/2019).
Against Taiwan’s Anti-Infiltration Bill

**Figure 10:** "Anti-Infiltration Law should change its name to 'Blocking Cross-Strait Exchanges Law'" (Want Daily, 12/31/19).

**Figure 11:** "The mainland will benefit Taiwan, counterstrike against Anti-Infiltration Bill" (Want Daily, 12/30/19).

**Figure 12:** "Anti-Infiltration Bill, controlling one million Taiwanese merchant families" (Want Daily, 12/27/19).

**Figure 13:** "Anti-Infiltration Bill about to pass a reading, Taiwanese merchants worry about a return to martial law" (Want Daily, 12/24/19).

**Figure 14:** "Xi promotes peaceful unification; the green camp changes the law to resist, builds a wall against exchanges" (Want Daily, 12/23/19).

**Figure 15:** "The green camp blocks cross-Strait scholarly exchanges" (Want Daily, 11/28/19).

**Figure 16:** "Han blasts Anti-Infiltration Bill, the bill is strapping a bomb on the citizenry’s neck" (China Times, 12/30/19).

**Figure 17:** "China News Service: obtaining a scholarship or internship could be illegal, Anti-Infiltration Bill is hurting Taiwan’s own youth" (China Times, 12/22/19).
Against the United States

Figure 18: "Surrounding China, the US completes its set up" (Want Daily, 12/20/19).

Figure 19: "Five of America’s Indo-Pacific partners disrupting the Taiwan Strait, provoking China" (Want Daily 12/8/19).

Figure 10: "China strikes back against America’s meddling of internal affairs" (Want Daily, 12/4/19).

Figure 21: "Trump signs ‘Hong Kong Interference Act,’ infuriating Beijing" (Want Daily, 11/29/19).

Figure 22: "American think tank promotes US-Taiwanese official communication office, China promises military retaliation if the office is established" (Want Daily, 11/27/19).

Figure 23: "The US Congress passes the ‘Hong Kong Interference Act’" (Want Daily, 11/21/19).

Figure 24: "The cross-Strait status quo is hard to maintain" (Want Daily, 11/16/19).

Figure 25: "Scholar: Trump might sell out Taiwan" (Want Daily, 11/9/19).

Figure 26: "Xi- Trump phone call: China is concerned about American interference into Hong Kong and Taiwan affairs" (China Times, 2019).
APPENDIX F: DISCLAIMERS

Assumptions: This report operates under the assumption that the interviewees were honest and candid. The author has no reason at the time of writing this to question that assumption. Where possible, the information provided by the interviewees was cross-checked with information from other interviewees and publicly available information.

Limitations: This report has two main limitations: one, the author did not interview Chinese government officials and give them an opportunity to provide their views. The author sought to address this by interviewing Taiwanese organizations accused of being infiltrated by the Chinese government but understands that the Chinese perspective is still lacking. Two, this research relies only on qualitative data. This is mainly because the study of the effects of propaganda and disinformation is such a new field that scholars are still attempting to create a sound quantitative method to estimate their effects.

Ethical considerations and financial transparency: Due to the sensitivity of this topic and the Chinese government’s penetration into Taiwanese society, this report attributes most interviewees by only their respective organizations. The author deems this necessary to protect the sources’ safety, even if it affects this report’s credibility. This project is funded by Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. Each center provided 2,000 dollars for the author to conduct research in Taiwan.


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